

Home Education in New South Wales: Experiences with Registration

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Contents

Company Information	2
Contents	3
1. Executive Summary	5
2. Background	6
3. Methodology	7
Recruitment and Participation	7
Ethical and Privacy Considerations	7
Data Analysis	8
Limitations	8
4. Findings and Discussion	9
Reasons for homeschooling	9
Current registration status	11
Time taken for the registration process	12
Enrolment in school during the registration period	13
Requests for Additional Documentation	14
Experiences of the Registration Process.....	15
Implications for HEA	17
Registration as a High-Stakes Process.....	17
The Authorised Person as the Determining Factor in Registration Experiences.....	18
<i>Negative experiences with APs</i>	18
<i>Positive experiences with APs</i>	19
Navigating the Registration Process	20
5. Conclusion and Recommendations	22
Recommendations.....	22
Recommendation 1: Explore key findings in greater depth through Stage 2 interviews..	22
Recommendation 2: Investigate how HEA can support families better through the registration process	23
Recommendation 3: Use the findings to inform advocacy and engagement with the Department of Education.....	23
6. References	25
Appendix 1	26

List of Tables

Table 1. Reasons for homeschooling	26
Table 2. Current registration status of respondents.....	26
Table 3. School enrolment during application process	26
Table 4. Length of registration period.....	26
Table 5. Additional information requested by the APs (10 respondents)	27
Table 6. Registration experiences.....	27

List of Figures

Figure 1. Reasons for homeschooling	9
Figure 2. Current registration status of respondents	11
Figure 3. Length of time taken for the registration process.....	12
Figure 4. School enrolment status during application period.....	13
Figure 5. Types of additional information requested by APs.....	15
Figure 6. Respondents' levels of agreement with statements about their experiences of the home education registration process (n = 27)	16

1. Executive Summary

This report presents findings from Stage 1 of a mixed-methods study examining the experiences of New South Wales home educating families with the home education registration process. Conducted in May and June 2026, this study was undertaken during a period of transition in the administration of home education in New South Wales. Data were collected after responsibility for home education registration transferred from NESA to the Department of Education, but before any substantive changes were made to the registration guidelines and procedures that had operated under NESA. Therefore, the findings provide an important baseline of families' experiences under the former NESA registration framework, administered by the Department of Education, immediately prior to the implementation of the Department's proposed reforms.

It was found that while educational philosophy was an important motivation for just over half the participants, many respondents also reported turning to home education in response to concerns relating to bullying, mental health, neurodiversity, disability, medical needs, or school environments that they believed were not meeting their children's needs adequately. For these families, home education was frequently viewed as a necessary educational pathway rather than simply an educational preference.

Although many respondents described the registration process as clear and manageable, the respondents reported consistently high levels of anxiety associated with registration. Qualitative data suggest that families experienced registration as a high-stakes process occurring during a period when many were already managing pressing concerns about their children's learning and wellbeing. Experiences were influenced strongly by interactions with Authorised Persons (APs). Positive experiences were associated with knowledgeable, respectful and supportive APs, and negative experiences were linked to inconsistent practices, the application of school-based assumptions to home education, and differing interpretations of registration requirements. The findings also highlight the important role of information, peer support and practical guidance in helping families navigate the registration process.

The report concludes with recommendations to investigate key issues identified in the survey through Stage 2 interviews, strengthen support for home educating families, and inform future advocacy and engagement with the Department of Education.

2. Background

Home education is a legally recognised educational pathway in New South Wales under the Education Act 1990 (NSW). Families are required to register with the relevant education authority and periodically demonstrate that a suitable educational program is being provided for their children. Until recently, responsibility for the administration of home education registration rested with the New South Wales Education Standards Authority (NESA).

Recent scrutiny of home education administration, including the New South Wales Auditor-General's performance audit, *Alternative School Settings and Home Schooling*, has led to a period of policy and administrative change. Responsibility for home education transitioned from NESA to the New South Wales Department of Education (the Department) in May 2025, several months before the release of the Auditor-General's report in September 2025. The Department subsequently commenced the development of new policies, procedures and administrative practices in late 2025 and, following a period of consultation, propose implementation of these changes in late 2026.

In this context, the Home Education Association (HEA) undertook a survey of New South Wales home educating families in mid-2026 to document experiences of the registration process prior to the implementation of the Department's reforms. The survey was designed to establish an evidence-informed baseline describing families' experiences of registration, interactions with Authorised Persons, administrative requirements, and perceptions of the registration process more broadly.

The findings provide an important baseline against which the impact of future changes may be assessed. They also provide an evidence base to support HEA's engagement with the Department regarding proposed policy and procedural reforms, ensuring that the perspectives and experiences of home educating families are represented in discussions about the future administration of home education in New South Wales.

This report presents the findings of the survey and summarises both quantitative and qualitative evidence provided by respondents regarding their experiences of home education registration in New South Wales. It primarily captures respondents' experiences under the regulatory and administrative arrangements that applied while home education registration was administered by NESA.

3. Methodology

This report presents findings from Stage 1 of a broader mixed methods study examining the experiences of home educating families with the home education registration process in New South Wales. Stage 1 comprised an online survey of home educating parents and carers. Stage 2 of the study will involve qualitative interviews with a subset of participants to explore emerging issues and experiences in greater depth.

The survey was designed to gather information about families' experiences of the registration process, including interactions with Authorised Persons (APs), waiting times for registration decisions, and perceptions of the registration and monitoring process more broadly. The survey included predominantly closed-response questions, including multiple-choice and Likert items, together with opportunities for respondents to provide additional comments through open-ended questions.

Recruitment and Participation

The survey was made available online through the Home Education Association (HEA) website. Participation was voluntary and open to New South Wales home educating families who had experience with the home education registration process.

A total of 27 valid responses were received from NSW homeschooling families and included in the analysis. Respondents were also invited to indicate their willingness to participate in a follow-up interview as part of Stage 2 of the study.

Ethical and Privacy Considerations

Participants were provided with a Plain Language Statement prior to commencing the survey. The statement outlined the purpose of the study, how information would be used, and the voluntary nature of participation.

To protect participant privacy, survey responses were separated from identifying information, such as names and email addresses, prior to analysis. Identifying information collected for the purpose of contacting participants regarding follow-up interviews was stored separately from survey responses and was not included in the analysis reported here.

All data are stored in password-protected files and managed in accordance with the Home Education Association's privacy and data management policies.

Data Analysis

Given the relatively small sample size and the self-selected nature of participation, the quantitative analysis was limited to descriptive statistical techniques. Responses were summarised using frequencies and graphical representations where appropriate.

Responses to open-ended questions were analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes relating to families' experiences of the registration process. Qualitative findings are presented alongside quantitative results to provide additional context and insight into respondents' experiences.

Limitations

Participation in the survey was voluntary, and respondents self-selected into the study. As a result, the findings cannot be assumed to be representative of all home educating families in New South Wales. Therefore, the results should be interpreted as reflecting the experiences and perspectives of survey respondents.

Notwithstanding this limitation, the survey provides valuable insight into the experiences of home educating families and establishes a baseline against which the impact of future policy and administrative changes may be considered.

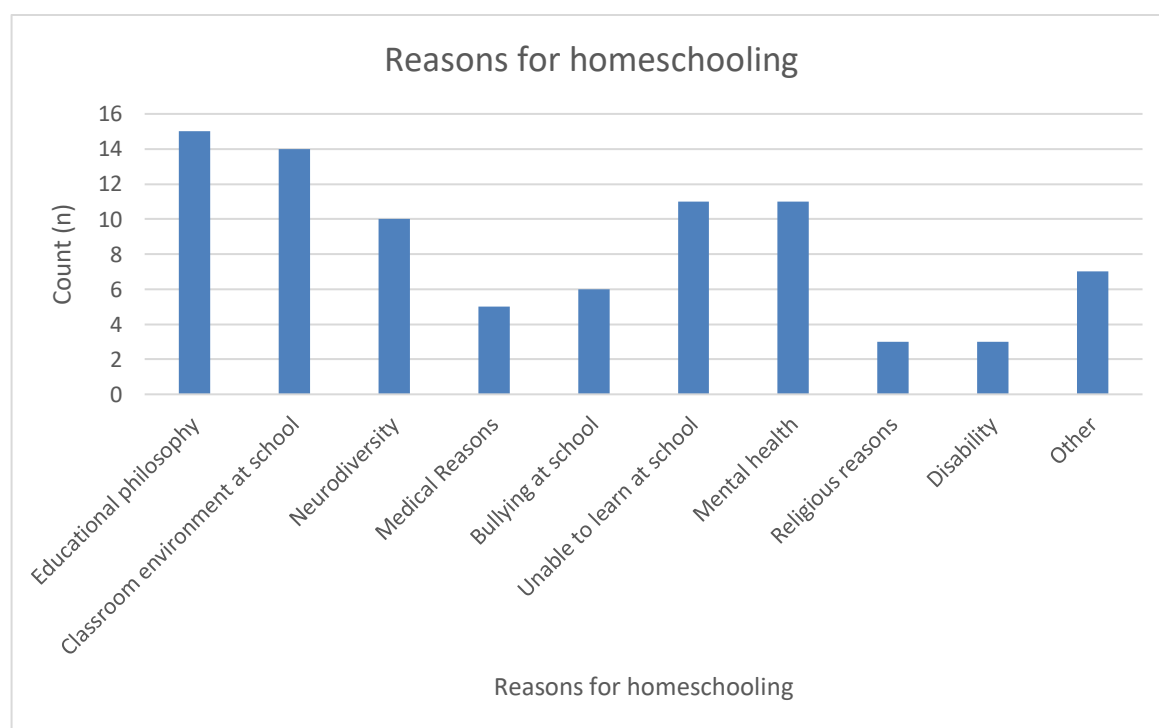
4. Findings and Discussion

This section presents the findings from the survey and integrates quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive overview of respondents' experiences. The findings are organised around key aspects of the home education registration process, including reasons for home educating, registration experiences, interactions with Authorised Persons (APs), and the supports and challenges families encountered. Where relevant, qualitative comments are included to provide additional context and insight into the survey results.

Reasons for homeschooling

As shown in Figure 1, educational philosophy was the most frequently selected reason for home educating (n = 15). However, respondents also reported a range of factors relating to their children's experiences within school settings. These included concerns about the classroom environment (n = 14), children being unable to learn effectively at school (n = 11), mental health concerns (n = 11), neurodiversity (n = 10), bullying (n = 6), medical reasons (n = 5), and disability (n = 3). Most respondents (n = 20) identified more than one reason for home educating, highlighting the complex circumstances underpinning many families' decisions.

Figure 1. Reasons for homeschooling



Qualitative comments provide further context for these findings. Several respondents described school environments that they believed were unable to meet their children's individual learning, social, emotional or developmental needs. This included references to neurodiversity, giftedness, bullying, mental health concerns, and experiences where school attendance had become a source of distress to the student. Other respondents expressed

concerns about aspects of mainstream schooling, including testing practices, time spent at school and teacher-to-student ratios. Family circumstances and relocation were also identified as contributing factors.

These findings also provide useful context when considered alongside recent Department of Education data presented in the *Home Schooling Data Reports Relating to 2025* (New South Wales Department of Education, 2026). While the Department's administrative data from 2025 identify philosophical reasons (19.08%), special learning needs (21.20%), religious reasons (5.75%) and bullying (0.11%) as commonly reported motivations for home education, more than half of the applications in 2025 (53.86%) were recorded as either "other" (33.09%) or "nil response" (20.77%), leaving the reasons for a substantial proportion of applications unclear. The findings from the present survey suggest that families' motivations are often complex and multi-layered, with respondents frequently identifying multiple, overlapping factors influencing their decision to home educate. This highlights potential limitations in the Department's current categorisation and reporting of reasons for home education, particularly in capturing the diverse and often overlapping circumstances that contribute to families' decisions, and suggests a need for more nuanced data collection and reporting.

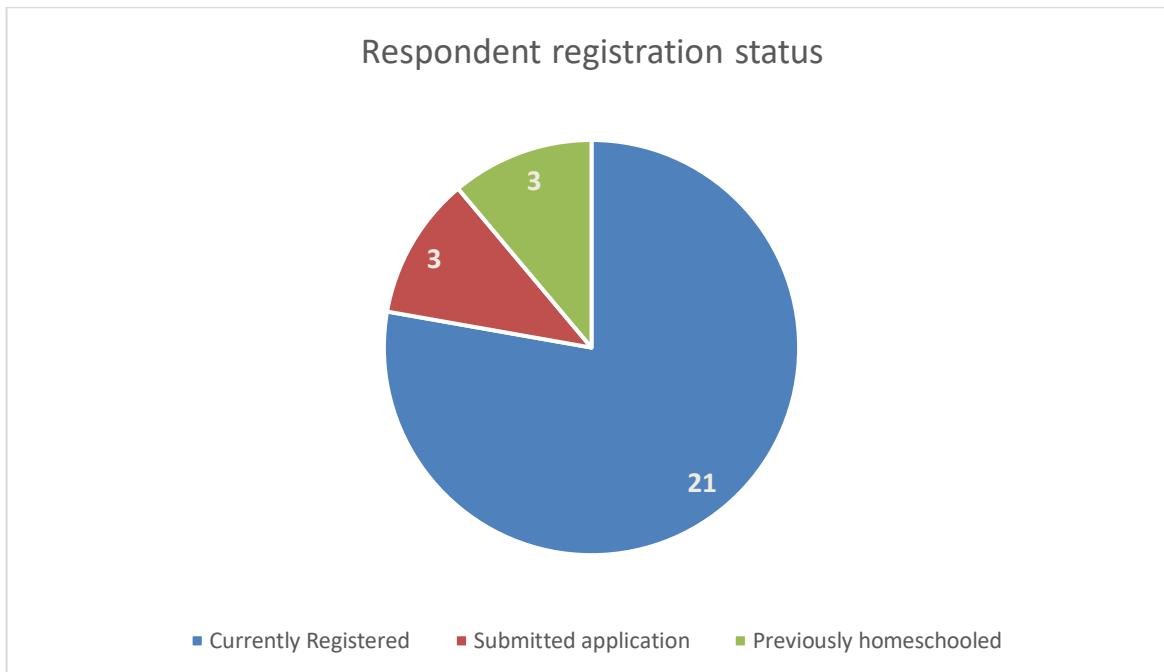
The survey findings may also help shed light on observations made by the Auditor-General (Audit Office of New South Wales, 2025), who noted that NESA had not examined whether unmet needs within the mainstream school system, or other factors, were contributing to increased demand for home education. In the present study, many responses pointed towards a mismatch between students' needs and the school environments available to them. While the survey sample is small and cannot be assumed to represent all home educating families in New South Wales, when considered alongside Departmental data and the Auditor-General's observations, the findings provide evidence of a broader pattern suggesting that educational environment, developmental needs and wellbeing may play an important role in families' decisions to home educate. This warrants further investigation through future research and policy discussion.

Taken together, the survey findings suggest that, for many respondents, home education was not undertaken primarily for ideological reasons, but rather as a response to concerns about children's wellbeing, learning needs, and educational experiences. This context is important when interpreting respondents' experiences of the registration process. In light of the respondents' reasons for homeschooling, registration appears to have occurred during periods when they were already managing complex educational, developmental, health or wellbeing concerns. Consequently, delays, uncertainty, requests for additional documentation, or inconsistent expectations may have a heightened impact on families who view home education as a necessary response to concerns about their child's learning, wellbeing, safety, or ability to thrive in a school environment.

Current registration status

Respondents were asked to indicate their current home education registration status. As shown in Figure 2, of the 27 valid responses, the majority ($n = 21$) of respondents were registered. A further three respondents had submitted an application and were awaiting an outcome, and three respondents had previously homeschooled (see Appendix 1 for Tables).

Figure 2. Current registration status of respondents



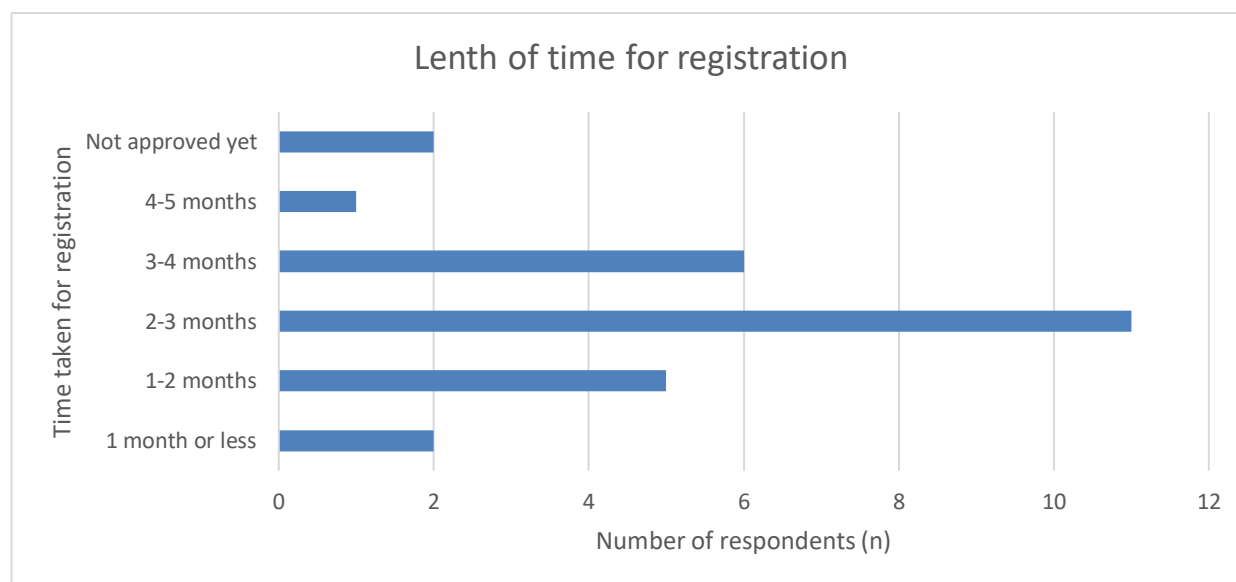
This data indicates that the survey findings are grounded largely in the experiences of currently registered home educating families. The inclusion of respondents who had submitted an application and those who had previously homeschooled also provides perspectives from different stages of engagement with the registration process, enabling consideration of both current and recent experiences.

Respondents were asked to identify their reasons for registering for home education and were able to select more than one response. Almost all respondents (26 of 27) indicated that registration was undertaken to comply with legal requirements. A smaller number of respondents also identified additional reasons, including demonstrating that they were doing everything possible to support their child's welfare ($n = 5$), gaining confidence that they were on the right track educationally ($n = 2$), and accessing support resources ($n = 1$). These findings suggest that compliance with legislative requirements was the dominant motivation for registration among respondents, although some families also perceived registration as providing reassurance or supporting broader aspects of their home education journey.

Time taken for the registration process

Respondents were asked how long it took for their home education registration application to be processed. As shown in Figure 3, waiting periods varied considerably. The most commonly reported timeframe was 2-3 months (n = 11), followed by 3-4 months (n = 6). A smaller number of respondents reported waiting 1-2 months (n = 5) or one month or less (n = 2), while one respondent reported waiting 4-5 months. At the time of the survey, two respondents indicated that their applications had not yet been approved.

Figure 3. Length of time taken for the registration process



These findings are broadly consistent with observations reported by the NSW Auditor-General (2025), which found that the average time taken to process home schooling registration applications increased from 40 days in 2019 to 65 days in 2024. The audit attributed much of this increase to growing application volumes and increasing workloads for both administrative staff and Authorised Persons. The Auditor-General noted that, despite efforts to improve efficiency, processing times continued to increase as demand for home schooling registration grew (Audit Office of New South Wales, 2025).

Overall, the findings suggest that registration was not typically a rapid process for respondents, with most reporting waiting periods of between two and four months. Qualitative responses indicate that, for some families, these waiting periods were associated with uncertainty and stress. Several respondents described the process as taking a long time, particularly the period between submitting an application and receiving a visit from an Authorised Person. One respondent contrasted their recent experience with an earlier registration period, commenting that,

When the whole process took 2-3 weeks, the anxious period was so much shorter. Now you have to be on alert for the home visit [for] 16 weeks. So that's 16 weeks of

stress induced insomnia and valuable headspace robbed from the most important job - educating my children.

Not all experiences were negative, however, with one respondent describing the process as "quicker and easier than expected", despite reporting a total processing time of nine weeks.

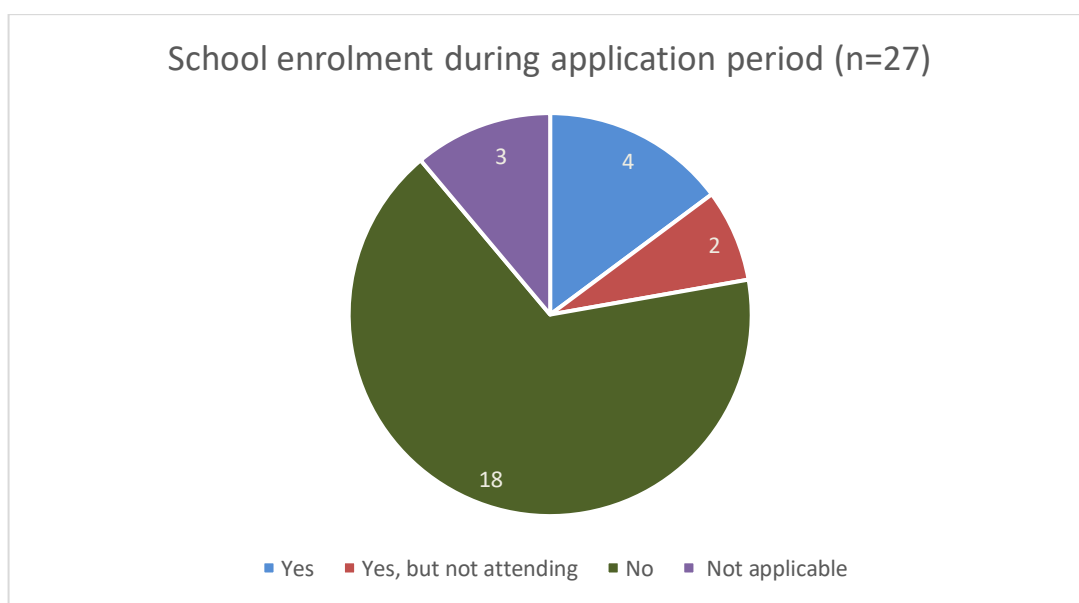
Taken together, these findings suggest that respondents' perceptions of timeliness were influenced not only by the overall duration of the registration process but also by the uncertainty experienced while awaiting contact, assessment and approval. The findings provide a useful baseline for monitoring perceptions of timeliness as changes to home education administration and registration processes continue to be implemented.

Enrolment in school during the registration period

Respondents were asked whether their child was enrolled in school while their home education registration application was being processed. As shown in Figure 4, most respondents (18 of 27) indicated that their child was not enrolled in school during the application period. However, as the survey did not distinguish between initial registrations and renewal applications, these data do not indicate how many school-aged children had been withdrawn from school while awaiting initial registration approval.

A smaller number reported that their child remained enrolled and was attending school ($n = 4$), or that their child was enrolled but not attending ($n = 2$). Three respondents indicated that the question was not applicable to their circumstances ($n = 3$). These findings suggest that many families were relying on the timely processing of home education applications, with relatively few maintaining active school enrolment arrangements while awaiting registration outcomes.

Figure 4. School enrolment status during application period



While the present survey does not allow conclusions to be drawn about how many school-aged children were awaiting initial registration approval, the findings nevertheless highlight the importance of timely registration processes. Most respondents reported that

- their child was not enrolled in school during the application period
- they had chosen to home educate in response to a complex combination of educational, health, wellbeing and school-environment factors
- they experienced waiting periods of several months for registration approval
- they experienced high levels of anxiety throughout the registration process.

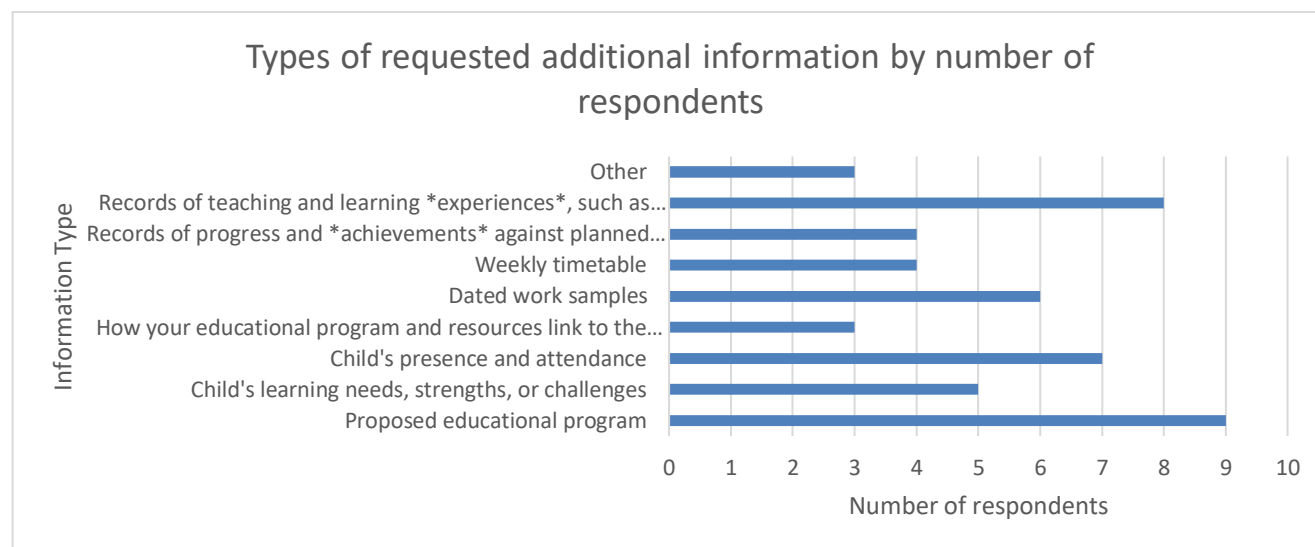
When considered alongside respondents' reasons for home educating and the finding that almost all respondents (26 of 27) sought registration in order to comply with legal requirements, these findings point to a difficult tension faced by some families. Many appeared to be balancing a desire to comply with legal requirements against what they perceived to be their child's immediate educational, developmental, health or wellbeing needs. For families who had turned to home education because of concerns relating to bullying, mental health, disability, neurodiversity or adverse school experiences, delays in registration may be experienced as more than an administrative inconvenience. Rather, they may prolong and compound a period of complex and often overlapping stressors, during which parents feel unable to fully address what they perceive to be pressing concerns relating to their child's wellbeing and educational circumstances. This observation is consistent with concerns raised by the Auditor-General (Audit Office of New South Wales, 2025), who noted stakeholder concerns regarding the impact of registration delays on families seeking to transition children out of unsuitable school environments.

Requests for Additional Documentation

Respondents were asked whether they had been requested to provide additional documentation as part of the registration process. Almost half of respondents (12 of 27) reported receiving a request for further information, while 13 respondents indicated that no additional documentation had been requested. Two respondents had not yet reached this stage of the process.

Figure 5 demonstrates that requests for additional documentation related to a wide range of sources. Respondents reported being asked to provide information about educational planning, learning activities, attendance during the AP's visit, student needs, and evidence of learning progress. The breadth of documentation requested suggests that, for many families, the registration process involved supplying many forms of supporting evidence to demonstrate the suitability and implementation of their home education program.

Figure 5. Types of additional information requested by APs



The findings suggest that many families were required to provide a substantial volume and range of supporting documentation as part of the registration process. While some variation in information requirements may reflect individual family circumstances, the diversity of additional documentation requested may point to a need for greater transparency regarding the evidence that is sought by Authorised Persons. Clearer guidance could assist families to prepare appropriate documentation in advance and may reduce some of the stress, uncertainty and administrative burden described in respondents' qualitative comments.

Experiences of the Registration Process

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements about their experiences of the home education registration process (Figure 6). Overall, respondents reported mixed experiences. Most agreed that the application process was relatively clear, with 22 of the 27 respondents indicating either somewhat or strong agreement. Consistent with this finding, most respondents did not feel that the registration process was complicated or that they had to "jump many hurdles" to complete registration successfully. At first glance, this contrasts with observations reported by the Auditor-General in 2025, which noted that some stakeholders found NESA's information and guidance relating to home schooling registration complex and confusing (Audit Office of New South Wales, 2025). However, the qualitative findings presented later in this report suggest a more nuanced picture. While respondents generally understood the overall registration process, many reported uncertainty regarding documentation requirements, curriculum expectations and how requirements would be interpreted in practice. Respondents also frequently relied on informal support networks, including social media and other home educating families, to navigate the process. Taken together, these findings suggest that understanding the procedural steps involved in registration did not necessarily translate into confidence about what was expected or how requirements would be applied.

Figure 6. Respondents' levels of agreement with statements about their experiences of the home education registration process (n = 27)



Despite generally positive perceptions of the clarity of the process, respondents still reported high levels of anxiety associated with registration. Twenty participants agreed that the registration process was anxiety-producing. This was one of the strongest patterns observed in the survey. The findings suggest that clarity of process alone is not sufficient to reduce anxiety, with many respondents reporting that the registration process remained stressful despite generally understanding what was required of them.

Respondents reported difficulties accessing information through official channels. Only seven respondents agreed that they could easily find all the information they needed on the Department website. Many reported seeking assistance from social media groups, with over half agreeing that they relied on these networks during the registration process. These findings suggest that informal peer-support networks play an important role in helping families navigate registration requirements.

The survey indicates that respondents generally viewed the planning requirements associated with registration positively. Sixteen participants agreed that the educational plan they developed would be helpful in teaching their child, suggesting that they saw value in the planning exercise itself. Similarly, most respondents (n=17) reported being comfortable with a home visit from an Authorised Person (AP) or Moderator. This indicates that concerns about the registration process may relate less to the visit itself and more to other aspects of the registration experience.

Taken together, these findings suggest that respondents generally understood the registration process and recognised value in key elements of it. However, the consistently high levels of reported anxiety, combined with difficulties accessing information through official sources, indicate that many families experienced the process as stressful.

Implications for HEA

These findings may also have implications for the support provided to families navigating registration. There may be value in reviewing how HEA supports families, including the provision of practical guidance, opportunities for peer support, and resources that clarify expectations and help families understand what to expect throughout the registration process, particularly during periods of waiting and uncertainty.

Registration as a High-Stakes Process

While respondents reported a range of experiences with the registration process, a consistent theme across the qualitative data was the perception that registration was a high-stakes process with considerable consequences for families. This perception appeared to shape respondents' feelings, experiences and interactions throughout the registration journey.

Several respondents expressed confidence in their decision to home educate and in the quality of education they were providing for their children. However, this confidence did not necessarily translate into confidence in the registration process itself. Participants frequently described concerns about whether their educational programs, supporting documentation, or home education practices would satisfy the expectations of an Authorised Person (AP). One respondent explained,

I KNOW I'm providing a better education than they could get at any of our local schools, but I always worry that the evidence I'll have ready won't demonstrate that to the AP's satisfaction.

For some respondents, uncertainty about how their application would be assessed contributed considerably to feelings of stress and anxiety. Participants described concerns about whether they had interpreted requirements correctly, whether their planning documentation would be considered adequate, and whether they were representing the learning taking place within their homes effectively. One respondent described the challenge of "trying to portray the enormity of what we do every single day to homeschool

our children, and do it justice", while another reported feeling overwhelmed by the process, stating,

I wasn't too sure if I had understood everything I had to do or if my plan was what it should [be]. I also felt really overwhelmed starting and making the plan as the information from NESAs and government's site was hard to understand, especially reading the outcomes I wasn't sure what was expected as the text was hard to understand.

The perceived consequences of an unfavourable outcome appeared to heighten respondents' sense of vulnerability during the registration process. For some families, these pressures had a substantial emotional impact. Respondents described feelings of stress, self-doubt, guilt and diminished wellbeing associated with the registration process. One participant reported that the experience contributed to "feelings of failure" and a decline in both parent and child wellbeing. Others described the process as "painful and unhelpful" or, more starkly, as "hell".

The Authorised Person as the Determining Factor in Registration Experiences

Respondents consistently identified the Authorised Person (AP) as the most influential factor shaping their experience of registration. While some participants described highly positive experiences characterised by support, respect and constructive guidance, others reported experiences marked by inconsistency, excessive demands, intimidation and uncertainty. Across the responses, it was the quality, approach and perceived understanding of the AP, rather than the registration requirements themselves, that appeared to determine whether families experienced the process positively or negatively.

Negative experiences with APs

Negative experiences were commonly associated with perceptions that APs lacked understanding of home education, applied school-based assumptions, or imposed requirements that extended beyond published guidelines. Several respondents described APs as "demanding", "intimidating" or inflexible in their expectations. A recurring concern was inconsistency between APs, particularly when families were allocated a different AP during a subsequent registration cycle. As one respondent explained, "After a number of reregistrations, I was sure of myself until I had a new AP, which I didn't know." Another participant noted that "one [AP] followed the guidelines and one, well she sets her own and demands things done her way". A third described an AP as requesting "more than required" and being "quite blunt and rude". These experiences created uncertainty about what would be expected during registration and renewal, with some respondents expressing concern that individual APs exercised considerable discretion in interpreting requirements. Given the high levels of anxiety reported elsewhere in the survey, variability in the interpretation and application of registration requirements appears likely to be a contributing factor.

Several participants described feeling unable to challenge aspects of an AP visit because registration approval directly affected their ability to continue educating their children at

home. This indicates a pronounced power imbalance. One respondent described feeling unable to ask an AP to leave their home despite experiencing the interaction as *"rude, bossy, intimidating, and demanding"*. They feared that doing so could jeopardise renewal of registration. In their words, this left them feeling *"very disempowered to protect the sanctity of my home"*. These accounts suggest that negative experiences with APs may extend beyond dissatisfaction with the registration process itself, affecting families' sense of agency, privacy and control within their own homes. For some respondents, the impact arose not only from concern about registration outcomes, but from the experience of having a private family space become the site of a high-stakes evaluation, creating feelings of vulnerability and loss of control that extended beyond the procedural aspects of registration.

Some respondents also described situations in which they perceived APs to be making subjective judgements about educational decisions that extended beyond the assessment of registration requirements. One participant reported that an AP requested specific learning trackers, daily dated work and additional evidence of learning beyond work samples. The same respondent also reported that the AP advised their child that their place of employment was *"not a suitable job"* and that they *"must not ever leave schooling for that work"*. The concern raised by the respondent indicates a perception that a personal judgement had been made about the educational value of the work experience without consideration of the family's goals or the student's circumstances. It also suggests that insufficient regard may have been given to the broader role that employment can play in a young person's learning and development. Such experiences contribute to concerns that some APs may evaluate home education programs through the lens of personal views about education and future pathways rather than the specific context of the family concerned.

These findings suggest that respondents' experiences were shaped not only by the procedural requirements of registration, but by the significance attached to the outcome of the process itself. As discussed earlier, many respondents reported homeschooling because of concerns relating to bullying, mental health, neurodiversity, disability, medical needs, or previous difficulties within school settings. Viewed in this context, registration is experienced as more than an administrative requirement. For some families, it represents a process that may determine whether they can provide an educational environment that they believe best supports their child's wellbeing, learning and future development. This broader context helps explain why many respondents described the registration process as highly stressful, even when they considered the process itself to be relatively clear.

Positive experiences with APs

Not all respondents reported negative interactions with APs. Indeed, many participants described highly positive experiences that reduced anxiety and increased confidence in the registration process. Several respondents indicated that positive interactions with APs helped reduce anxiety and increase confidence. Constructive feedback, practical advice and supportive communication were viewed favourably, with one respondent noting that

they felt "much more comfortable and confident" following their meeting with an AP. As one participant wrote,

[Our AP] was very courteous when [they] rang to organise an assessment. [The AP] is very easy to communicate with. I've met [the AP] a few times now, and [they] make me feel at ease when discussing my children's work and my children are happy to share their schooling with [them] as well. [The AP] is good at offering advice or at making suggestions. Overall, [they are] very supportive of the job that I'm doing and we all feel very positive after [the] visit.

Positive experiences were most commonly associated with APs who demonstrated a strong understanding of home education and took the time to understand individual children and family circumstances. Respondents described these APs as supportive, respectful and encouraging, valuing their constructive feedback and willingness to work within the unique context of home education rather than applying school-based assumptions. Trust and familiarity were particularly important where families had worked with the same AP over multiple registration cycles. As one long-term home educator explained, the most effective APs approached the role with curiosity and a desire to understand "how learning works best in a particular family for a particular student."

Notably, even respondents who described very positive interactions with APs often continued to report anxiety about registration. This suggests that supportive APs may reduce stress and build confidence, but do not entirely remove the high-stakes nature of the process. Taken together, the findings indicate that consistency, understanding and professional judgement in AP practice may be as important as the registration requirements themselves in shaping families' experiences.

Navigating the Registration Process

Respondents' experiences suggest that understanding and navigating registration requirements was easier for some families than others. While many described the application process itself as straightforward, several distinguished between completing the application and preparing an educational plan, with the latter often generating greater uncertainty and anxiety. As one respondent observed, "The application itself is easy, making a plan to present can cause a fair bit of anxiety."

Access to relevant knowledge and support appeared to influence how respondents experienced the process. Participants with a background in education or extensive home education experience often reported feeling more confident interpreting requirements and understanding what was expected. Others described curriculum outcomes, planning requirements and administrative procedures as difficult to navigate, particularly when requirements were not clearly understood. For example, one participant reflected on confusion surrounding the Year 10 to Year 11 transition, stating,

I made a mistake at the year 10-11 transition. I didn't realise I had to submit BOTH a renewal request AND the certificate of Year 10 completion request. (I made an assumption that they were linked).

Support from other home educating families was an important source of guidance. One respondent explained, "With help from other homeschool families and stories I was able to navigate the process," while also noting that, "No support in this respect was available from the registering body." These comments align with earlier findings indicating that many respondents relied on informal networks and social media groups for information and reassurance during registration. It also aligns with the observation by several respondents that information was not easy to find on the Department's website.

Respondents also identified opportunities to improve the process, including suggestions to consolidate information and resources in a single location, provide clearer guidance about requirements and transition points, and reduce administrative errors. Although many participants ultimately described the process as manageable, the findings suggest that access to clear information, practical guidance and peer support can play an important role in helping families navigate registration requirements.

These findings suggest that families enter the registration process with varying levels of familiarity with educational terminology, curriculum requirements and administrative procedures. While experienced home educators and those with education-sector knowledge may find the process relatively straightforward, others may need additional support to interpret requirements and prepare documentation. The prominence of peer support within respondents' accounts also suggests that home education networks, such as HEA, play an important role in helping families understand and navigate the registration process.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study was conducted during a period of considerable change in the administration of home education in New South Wales, and provides an important baseline of families' experiences under NESA's registration arrangements. While educational philosophy was an important motivation for some respondents, many reported turning to home education in response to concerns relating to bullying, mental health, neurodiversity, disability, medical needs, or experiences within school settings that they felt were not meeting their children's needs. Although the registration process was often described as clear and manageable, respondents reported high levels of anxiety, reflecting the perception of registration as a high-stakes process occurring at a time when many families were already managing complex educational and wellbeing concerns. Experiences were strongly influenced by interactions with Authorised Persons (APs), with positive experiences associated with knowledgeable, respectful and supportive APs, and negative experiences linked to inconsistent practices, the application of school-based assumptions to home education, and differing interpretations of registration requirements. The findings also highlight the important role of clear information, practical guidance and peer support in helping families navigate the registration process, with many respondents drawing on the experience of other home educating families to understand and meet registration requirements.

Recommendations

Drawing on the findings of this initial survey, the following recommendations are intended to guide the next stage of the research, inform HEA's support for families, and support future engagement with the Department of Education.

Recommendation 1: Explore key findings in greater depth through Stage 2 interviews

The survey identified several issues that warrant further investigation through qualitative interviews, including:

- Exploring the factors contributing to anxiety during the registration process
- Analysing the ways in which families experience the high-stakes nature of registration
- Investigating experiences of consistency and inconsistency between Authorised Persons (APs)
- Examining perceptions of fairness, transparency and accountability within the registration process
- Gaining deeper insight into the impact of registration experiences on family wellbeing
- Collecting families' suggestions for improving the registration process.

A key focus of Stage 2 should be examining the relationship between registration anxiety, experiences with Authorised Persons, waiting times, perceptions of procedural fairness and families' broader educational and wellbeing circumstances. Particular attention should be given to understanding how and why these factors interact to influence families' experiences of registration.

Recommendation 2: Investigate how HEA can support families better through the registration process

The findings suggest that many families rely on peer networks, social media groups and informal advice when navigating registration requirements. While HEA already provides a range of resources and information for home educating families, the survey findings indicate that opportunities may exist to strengthen support in areas where respondents reported uncertainty, anxiety or reliance on informal sources of information.

It is recommended that HEA review its existing resources, guidance materials and support mechanisms in light of the findings from this study and the proposed Stage 2 interviews. Particular consideration could be given to:

- preparing families for registration and renewal processes
- clarifying documentation and evidence requirements
- supporting the development of educational plans
- preparing families for AP visits
- supporting families homeschooling children with additional needs
- providing clearer information about registration timelines and key transition points
- strengthening opportunities for peer support and mentoring, particularly for families new to home education.

Recommendation 3: Use the findings to inform advocacy and engagement with the Department of Education

The findings identify several issues that warrant ongoing discussion with the Department of Education as responsibility for home education administration continues to evolve. In particular, the survey findings, Departmental data and the Auditor-General's report collectively highlight the importance of consistent implementation of registration requirements, timely registration processes, clarity of information and guidance, and recognition of the diverse circumstances that lead families to home educate.

It is recommended that HEA use the findings from this study, together with evidence gathered through the proposed Stage 2 interviews, to engage constructively with the Department on matters affecting the registration experience of home educating families. Particular attention should be given to promoting consistency in AP practice, reducing avoidable uncertainty within the registration process, improving communication and guidance for families, and ensuring that registration processes remain responsive to children whose educational, developmental, health or wellbeing needs require timely access to home education.

Areas for Future Advocacy and Policy Engagement

The findings also suggest several issues that may warrant future discussion with the Department of Education:

- Consistency in AP training, professional judgement and interpretation of registration requirements.
- Greater transparency regarding the types of documentation that may be requested during registration and renewal.
- Improved accessibility and clarity of information, guidance and resources for families.
- Timeliness of registration processes and the impact of delays on families experiencing educational, developmental or wellbeing challenges.
- Recognition that many families enter home education in response to complex and overlapping circumstances rather than a single ideological preference.
- Collection and reporting of more nuanced data regarding reasons for home education to better inform policy development and service planning.
- Consideration of how registration processes can balance regulatory requirements with the immediate educational, developmental and wellbeing needs of children.

6. References

Audit Office of New South Wales. (2025). *Alternative school settings and home schooling*. NSW Auditor-General. <https://www.audit.nsw.gov.au/our-work/reports/alternative-school-settings-and-home-schooling>

Education Act 1990 (NSW). <https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-1990-008>

New South Wales Department of Education. (2026, June). *Home schooling data reports relating to 2025* [Report].

Appendix 1

Table 1. Reasons for homeschooling

Reasons for homeschooling	Respondents (n)
Educational philosophy	15
Classroom environment at school	14
Neurodiversity	10
Medical Reasons	5
Bullying at school	6
Unable to learn at school	11
Mental health	11
Religious reasons	3
Disability	3
Other	7

Table 2. Current registration status of respondents

Registration status	Respondents (n)
Currently Registered	21
Submitted application	3
Previously homeschooled	3

Table 3. School enrolment during application process

Enrolment in school	Respondents (n)
Yes	4
Yes, but not attending	2
No	18
Not applicable	3

Table 4. Length of registration period

Length of time	Respondents (n)
1 month or less	2
1-2 months	5
2-3 months	11
3-4 months	6
4-5 months	1
Not approved yet	2

Table 5. Additional information requested by the APs (10 respondents)

Types of information	Responses (n)
Proposed educational program	9
Child's learning needs, strengths, or challenges	5
Child's presence and attendance	7
How your educational program and resources link to the syllabus	3
Dated work samples	6
Weekly timetable	4
Records of progress and *achievements* against planned outcomes	4
Records of teaching and learning *experiences*, such as diaries or notes	8
Other	3

Table 6. Registration experiences

Item	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither yes nor no	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
a. The application for registration process was clear	1	2	2	12	10
b. The application for registration process was complicated	6	7	6	7	1
c. I had to jump many hurdles to get through the registration process	8	5	6	5	3
d. The registration process was anxiety producing	3	2	2	13	7
e. The registration process felt rewarding	7	3	10	5	2
f. I easily found all the information I needed on the Department of Education website	6	8	6	7	0
g. I sought help from groups on social media	5	0	7	4	11
h. I received help from HEA during the registration process	12	1	12	0	2
i. The plan I produced will be helpful in teaching my child	0	4	7	6	10
j. I was comfortable having a home visit from an Authorised Person / Moderator	3	5	N/A - 2	12	5